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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 001866

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN AND DRL

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST ARRESTED DAY AFTER PROTEST

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D).

¶1. (C) Summary: On October 23, the Deputy Chairman of the Syrdarya province branch of the Ezgulik human rights group was arrested by police and charged with several violations of the criminal code, including fraud. His arrest occurred one day after a public protest in the provincial capital of Guliston. Afterwards, the leader of Ezgulik appealed to the Embassy for help in paying for his legal defense. Given that the charges against him appear to be politically motivated and the amount requested is relatively small, we support providing assistance through the Global Human Rights Defenders Fund. End summary.

¶2. (C) On October 24, Ezgulik human rights group leader Vasila Inoyatova informed poloff that, on October 23, police in Syrdarya province arrested Karim Bozorboev, the Deputy Chairman of Ezgulik's Syrdarya province branch. Inoyatova reported that Bozorboev was charged with violating several statutes of the criminal code, including fraud, which she believed was politically motivated and stemmed from his human rights activity. It was unclear on what basis Bozorboev was charged. Inoyatova noted that fraud has lately become the "charge of the month" for prosecutors to use against human rights activists. Bozorboev's arrest was reported on October 24 by the Associated Press, the independent Uznews.net website, and in an internet press release from Ezgulik.

REACTION TO PUBLIC PROTEST IN SYRDARYA?

¶3. (C) Inoyatova believed that Bozorboev's arrest was directly related to a protest in Syrdarya's Yangiyer district center on October 22. The demonstration was organized by 300 market traders, who blocked a road to protest a decision by district authorities to relocate the market and annul the traders' part-ownership of it. Inoyatova reported that the authorities blamed Bozorboev for organizing the demonstration, although, according to her, he simply served as a mediator between the traders and authorities, and had no hand in organizing it.

HISTORY OF BEING A WHISTLEBLOWER

¶4. (C) Ironically, Bozorboev was instrumental in uncovering two high-profile incidents of fraud in the last few years, according to Ezgulik's press release. Before joining Ezgulik in 2004, Bozorboev was a member of the Syrdarya province branch of the Democratic Party "Fidokorlar" ("Selfishness"),

one of the five registered parties in Parliament. While participating in a financial inspection of the party's provincial branch, Bozorboev discovered that its leader, Gulnoza Latipova, had embezzled 6,109,420 soums (4,800 USD). After he went public with his accusation, Bozorboev was reportedly forced out of the party.

15. (C) In 2006, while already a member of Ezgulik, Bozorboev accused Imam Muminjon Usmonov in Guliston of demanding "donations" of 64,000 soum (50 USD) from persons interested in participating in the Hajj, which he then allegedly pocketed. After Bozorboev's accusation was made public, a group of aksakals (community elders) wrote a letter to President Karimov, asking him to investigate. According to Ezgulik, local NSS officers then approached the aksakals and threatened to charge them each with "illegal political activity" if they did not distance themselves from the letter. Uzbekistan's Muftiate then sent a delegation to Guliston headed by Deputy Mufti Abdurazzak Yunusov and Tashkent Head Imam Kurbanbai Tursunov to conduct an investigation, which concluded that Usmonov was innocent of any wrongdoing. Afterwards, Imam Usmonov reportedly wrote a letter to the General Prosecutor of Syrdarya province, accusing Bozorboev of libel. Bozorboev was charged with libel on October 23, but it is unclear if this charge stems from Usmonov's complaint.

EZGULIK REQUESTS ASSISTANCE IN PAYING FOR LEGAL DEFENSE

16. (C) During her discussion with poloff on October 24, Inoyatova requested Post's assistance in paying for Bozorboev's legal defense. She said that Bozorboev would

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need two lawyers: one registered in Tashkent and the other in Syrdarya, and estimated that their fees would cost a total of 300 USD. As of October 26, Inoyatova was still trying to find two lawyers who would agree to take his case. In the Uznews.net article from October 24, Inoyatova is quoted as saying that no embassy had responded to her request for help, even though poloff told her the same day that he was actively looking into her request.

COMMENT

17. (C) Given that the charges against Bozorboev appear to be politically motivated and that the funds requested for his legal defense are relatively modest, we will submit an application through the Global Human Rights Defenders Fund requesting 300 USD to pay for Bozorboev's lawyers.
NORLAND